The Architectural Influence of the United States in Mao's China (1949-76)

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Abstract

This paper aims to reveal and highlight an architectural influence of the United States in Mao's China. It does so by studying three cases arranged chronologically from the 1960s to 1970s. In postwar years, architectural communication between China and the United States was much restricted in a Cold-War confrontation of opposing political ideologies. Yet architecture of the United States remained influential amongst leading architects in China since the 1960s, albeit in an inconspicuous way. In particular, in a dramatic political change of the early 1970s, new architecture showing an American influence emerged in Guangzhou and Beijing. Soon after, aspects of American architecture of the time were increasingly referenced to by architects in China to re-interpret native traditions in a modernist language. Adopting a tripartite framework connecting "politics", "knowledge" and "form", this paper examines these interrelations as found in China from the 1960s to 1970s. It argues that knowledge of architecture of the United States was absorbed and adapted by architects in China for the creation of a Chinese modernism, for a political purpose of representing a national identity of China in a contemporary formal language of the time.

The Architectural Influence of the United States in Mao's China (1949-76)

Within a global network of knowledge exchange in the postwar period, the architectural influence exerted by the United States upon other countries arguably followed a clear pattern.[1] After World War II, the United States began to purposely and consciously export its architecture through specific agencies to present American political, economic, cultural, and aesthetic superiority in other countries, a situation characterized by a proliferation of American embassies and Hilton hotels.[2] Its architectural influence deeply penetrated into other western countries, and Japan, stimulating a widespread fascination in American technology, art, popular culture, and life style.[3] In some other regions, like Southeast Asia, the United States also replaced Britain as the primary focus of architectural attention in the postwar decades.[4]

However, American architectural influence in China in the postwar decades is a missing strand in current architectural historiography. Although certain aspects of this relationship have been addressed, the phenomenon has yet to be systematically studied.[5] This is largely due to the prevailing assumption that American influence in China was not comparable with that of the Soviet Union, which was ostensibly true. Architectural communication between China and the United States during the postwar decades was indeed restricted – not only by physical distance but also due to ideological confrontations between communist and capitalist blocs. At the same time as American architecture began to gain global momentum from the 1950s, the newly founded People's Republic of China (PRC) began looking to the Soviet Union as a model on which its own architectural production might draw. China's National Style was inspired by Soviet Socialist Realism and formally established as the correct approach to architectural composition, whereas modernism was held to have originated from the west and was denounced as a capitalist architectural style. In the 1960s, with revolutionary spirits being pushed further in the Great Leap Forward (GLF, 1958-65) and at the heights of Cultural Revolution (1966-69), formal and aesthetic considerations were abandoned, and an extreme functionalismemerged and prevailed in mainstream Chinese architectural practice.[6] An American influence in design would seem unimaginable under such conditions.[7]

Yet American architectural culture did influence that of Maoist China, even if its influence was more embedded, suppressed and, hence, inconspicuous. It was first manifest in the 1960s in references made to American work by Chinese architects engaged in aid projects outside China. It arguably reached a peak in the 1970s in a group of key projects in Beijing and Guangzhou built for functions related to foreign affairs, within the critical political background of a Sino-American rapprochement. Although there was no open acclamation to promote American architecture in political and architectural discussion, designs from the States persistently interested Chinese architects and political leaders. Interestingly and importantly, American architecture was invoked not only as a model of the latest modern architecture but also in the making of a "Chinese" modernism in the 1970s, which was further complicated by the ideological opposition between China and America as well as in the factional struggle within China's state politics.

Studies on the history of the architecture of modern China are now increasingly focusing on heterogeneous developments in its modern architecture, in relation to nation building and transfer of knowledge across distances, often from the west to China. To take this work one step further, this paper focuses on a lesser studied period in this history, and adopts a more comprehensive theoretical framework. Assuming a close connection between state politics, disciplinary knowledge and formal design in a tripartite framework, this paper will analyse

key developments framed by a political projection of national identity, American influence and the new architectural form of the early 1970s. In Mao's China the situation acquired special characteristics: architectural production was almost entirely based on a system of "design institutes"; these institutes were owned by the state, managed by the government officials, and directly framed by national policies, political movements and ideological needs of the time. Disciplinary knowledge in architecture, on the other hand, may be conceived as a link between formal design and state politics – knowledge here is considered neutral in itself for formal innovation while being, as a discourse, intertwined with forms of power in historical and institutional settings, as Michel Foucault has revealed.[8] This understanding of power-knowledge relations is an essential conceptual lens, without which hidden flows of design knowledge in systems governed by rigid political controls could not be seen and, in particular, without which the tacit support on the part of the central government for learning from the United States could not be explained.

The American influence on the architecture of Mao's China seems like a myth and a paradox: hidden but crucial, neglected yet important. This research, therefore, does more than to fill a gap in the current scholarship on the architectural history of modern China; it sets about to rethink transnational and transcontinental architectural communications in the 1970s and the role of knowledge transfer in redefining the development of modern architecture in China in a complex political environment. More questions need to be raised. What is the political background of American influence? How to account for Chinese architects' fascination with American architecture and the tacit support given by the state? How did Chinese architects adopt knowledge from the United States and adapt it to the local situation to create new forms and to serve political purposes? Can American influence be said to have had a significant impact on the development of modernism and modern architecture in China in a long historical perspective? Guided by these questions, the historical process of communication between China and the United States under a changing political background will be depicted by means of three cases, each showing, in different terms, how the design strategy of Chinese architects responded to both political requirements within and American influence without.

Historical Fabrics: Politics and Knowledge

To trace the line of American influence in Chinese architecture, the fundamental historical fact that the modern architectural profession of China originated from the west should not be ignored. Among its early precursors who studied abroad, a group of architects whose influence in China is well recognised – including Yang Tingbao, Liang Sicheng, Lin Huiyin and Tong Jun – received a Beaux-Arts education in the United States in the 1920s.[9]

After 1949, most of the first-generation, foreign trained architects continued their careers in the state-owned universities and design institutes that were established after a series of political reforms. Even though the dissemination of western modernism was occasionally restricted across the 1950s, the (largely American) Beaux-Arts tradition still provided a methodological foundation for the training of architects, research on Chinese architectural history and the creation of the National Style.[10] Following the denouncement by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev of Socialist Realism in 1954, China launched the "anti-waste" movement, which targeted the extravagant expression of the National Style. From the late 1950s, in the context of deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations and an increasingly troubled domestic economy, western modernism was gradually normalised and absorbed as a functionalism able to serve a more economic construction.

In the 1950s and 1960s, despite the scarcity of means for directly communicating with the United States, knowledge of contemporary American architecture could still infiltrate into China through various channels. These include the architectural communication with Hong Kong, especially the continuous communication between Guangzhou and Hong Kong; the foreign information collected by the Technical Information Institute (TII), being a special department in the Ministry of Construction responsible for systematically collecting, selecting and translating foreign architectural information before distributing to lower level design institutes;[11] and from the overseas experience of Chinese architects who worked on foreign aid projects. The early 1970s saw dramatic shift of international politics from radical ideological confrontation to détente. Facing an increasing threat from the Soviet Union since the late 1960s, both China and the United States began to seek opportunities to improve their relationship. After Mao's successor Lin Biao died in 1971, Premier Zhou Enlai took power and he quickly restored relations with the United States with Mao's endorsement, culminating with Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972. Meanwhile, economic development and urban construction were gradually revived. Under this context, a group of hotels and apartments to accommodate the increasing flow of western visitors and diplomats was first proposed.

China's state politics of the 1970s, however, was overshadowed by factional struggles at the top level. At the start of the decade Mao had begun stepping back, due his deteriorating health, and two factions gradually reached a dynamic balance in his wake:, the pragmatist leader Zhou Enlai took charge of foreign affairs and economic development; while the leftist leader Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, controlled the state apparatus of art production and ideological propaganda and continued to promote a radical leftist ideology. The pragmatists and leftists were constantly in opposition to each other in the political arena, but the country nevertheless found an equilibrium – going simultaneously towards the "left" in the radical ideology of its art and propaganda, and to the "right" in matters of economic development and foreign affairs. As an official slogan had it: 'Grasp Revolution, Promote Production.' This became the mainstream consensus. However, from 1973 onwards, the pragmatists were increasingly criticized and suppressed by the leftists until the top leftist leaders, the Gang of the Four, were suddenly purged after Mao's death in 1976.

When the pragmatists had the upper hand, in the years from 1972 to 1974, there was relatively active international architectural communication between China and the West, culminating in a visit to China by a delegation of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1974. Immediately after Nixon's visit in 1972, a group of American-Chinese professors were invited to China to give lectures, including architecture professor Joseph Lee from University of Michigan. In April 1974, a delegation of American architects, including Bill Slayton, vice president of the AIA, and famous architect Ieoh Ming Pei, came to investigate various aspects of China, from everyday life to architectural design. Although poorly reported in China, this trip was widely covered by the western media and it stimulated a wave of reports on China's new architecture among the major international architectural journals.[12] Both before the years of 1972-74 and after, communications with the West were more secretive. For example, an exhibition of China's recent construction achievements held in 1970 by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in London had only slight media coverage in the United Kingdom.[13] In 1975, a delegation of the Architectural Society of China (ASC) invited by the AIA to spend three weeks in fourteen American cities, reciprocating Chinese hospitality, resulted in no report in China, and minimal American coverage – honouring, in the US, the specific request of the Chinese architects who wanted to avoid criticism back in China.[14]

The fabrics of politics and knowledge were thus gradually evolving through three historical stages: the seclusion of the 1960s (to which China would, in a way, return in the late 1970s); the dramatic shift of the early 1970s; and the "open" period of 1972-74. The following three cases reflect these stages: the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH, 1964-73) designed in the mid-1960s; the new architecture in Beijing and Guangzhou in the early 1970s; and the Baiyun Hotel, dating to the mid-1970s. Close attention to their design strategies demonstrates a range of responses to both political needs and American influence.

BMICH: The Appeal of American Elegance

In the 1960s, the Chinese government put much emphasis on aid projects overseas. Projects overseas were given more budget and political support than the domestic projects, and were mostly designed by the best architects. In contrast with the mainstream functionalist buildings in the 1960s, these projects had more aesthetic and formal expression. One of the most prominent illustrations of these values is the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) in Sri Lanka, designed in 1964 and completed in 1973.[15] And it might be the earliest example of Chinese reference to American architecture. In this case, it was said that the architect, Dai Nianci (1920-91) referenced the American Embassy in India, designed by the American Edward Stone (Fig. 1).[16]

Figure 1: Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1973, Architect: Dai Nianci) (left) and the American Embassy in India (New Delhi, India, 1959, Architect: Edward Stone) (right).
Source: "Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall," accessed September 15, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bandaranaike_Memorial_International_Conference_Hall; "United States Ambassador to India," accessed September 15, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Ambassador_to_India.

This assumption is reasonable given that BMICH was born to be a building with many political concerns. In the 1960s, China's foreign policy was distancing itself from the Soviet Union, increasingly seeking engagement with the non-aligned nations of the so-called Third World. To rival the global influence of both the United States and the Soviet Union, BMICH represented China's ambition to play a greater role in this sphere. The American Embassy in India offered a successful precedent in its representation of the American presence in South Asia, and was critically appraised by the Chinese and adapted, in turn, to demonstrate a Chinese presence in this same geography – suggesting that China could achieve the same level of modernity as the United States despite its different ideology and political system.

Technically speaking, despite the scarcity of foreign information in the 1960s, Dai could still access data on the American Embassy. As the chief architect of Beijing Industrial Design Institute (BIDI), affiliated with the Ministry of Construction, Dai enjoyed privileged access to foreign information. Indeed, BIDI shared a office building with TII. Moreover, a four-month

period overseas working experience in Ceylon (as it was at the time) in 1964, at the outset of the project's design phase, exposed him directly to foreign sources.[17]

What most fascinated the Chinese architect was the American Embassy's "elegant" demonstration of an American ideology and national identity. The building was compared with the Taj Mahal and extolled to be 'marvellously non-functional' for its aesthetic and political success as the 'proof for all of quality in American taste'.[18] It symbolized American democratic values, prosperity, romance and pleasure with a strong and yet elegant monumentality. It a combined classical composition, balanced proportion, exquisite tectonic details and a sense of lightness, with nothing reminiscent of the muscular, ponderous, and heavy authoritarian stereotypes with which government buildings – and especially those realized in a Soviet classicism – were by this time associated.[19]

These qualities were emphatically imitated in the design of BMICH. The elevated platform and the tilting roof together create a sense of floating and flying. The façade is based on a classical tripartite composition of base, body and roof, finely proportioned. The tall, slender columns, the glass curtain wall, and such fine details as the emblem of the lion and the four heavy columns decorated with local patterns further contribute to the exquisiteness and elegance of the building.

Just as Stone's building was compared with the Taj Mahal, Dai sought to draw inspiration from the famous Temple of the Tooth (Sri Dalada Maligawa, in Kandy,) . The traditional roof of the temple was turned upside down to become the inward-tilting roof of BMICH, which gave the building a novel and modern appearance. Eschewing the rectangular plan of the American Embassy, the characteristic octangular shape of Temple of the Tooth was used in the composition of the floor plan, rendering it more iconic and dynamic. The building was said to resemble the blue water lily, Sri Lanka's national symbol, which pleased Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike a great deal. [20] A minor operation seems crucial here: Dai simply rotated the building volume a small angle so that the sharp edge rather than the flat surface was made to face the main entrance avenue, thereby intensifying the building's dynamism.

Dai's referencing of Stone came to be associated with a larger intellectual context in which the imagination of contemporary American architecture figured in the mentality of Chinese architects. Possibly because of Dai's invocation of the American Embassy at New Delhi, Stone's work became well-known and even influential among that generation of Chinese architects.[21] He was often associated with such "American" architects as Eero Saarinen, Minoru Yamasaki and John Portman, who, among others had been gathered by their American critics under the derogatory term "American populism". In China, their work was celebrated with the more moniker of "elegantalism" (*dianya zhuyi*), invoking its aesthetic and formal elegance. The official Chinese text book of "foreign architectural history," written immediately after the Cultural Revolution, surveyed postwar architectural trends in the west, including rationalism, Miesian modernism, brutalism, high-tech, regionalism, symbolism, and postmodernism. Among these trends, American "elegantalism" was given a high status, and considered as a trend opposed to brutalism, which in the eyes of Chinese architects was not worthy of imitation.[22] However, American populism was also named as "formalism" (*xingshi zhuyi*) in some official texts[23], implying that its careful consideration of form went precisely against the prevailing functionalism of mainstream practice. These different labels reflect the paradoxical and complicated attitudes towards contemporary American architecture at the time – admiration among architects tempered by suppression by the official ideologues.

The strong reception of American populism in China should be creditednot only to its elegant expression of modern materials and facilities, advanced technology, and functionality, but also its resonance with the "elegance" of the traditional Chinese architecture that had long been admired by architects in China. The elegance embedded in classical composition andexquisite details of , China's traditional architecture had once been translated into the pompous National Style, in line with the Socialist Realism; but re-interpreted through American influence in the case of BMICH, it became lighter, more dynamic and more technically sophisticated.[24] The similarities between BMICH and classical Chinese architecture are obvious: the axis of master plan, the concentric composition of floor plan and fine detailing seem to pay tribute to the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. Such a resonance, initially demonstrated in Dai's work of the 1960s, justified Chinese architects' fascination with American elegance. Its qualities, which architects understood to be shared by both contemporary-American and traditional Chinese architecture, was later absorbed into the official formal-aesthetic expression of China's state buildings into the 1970s.

"New Architecture" in Guangzhou and Beijing: Modern Outlook and Chinese Identity

American visitors to China in the "open" years from 1972 to 1974 noted the "new architecture" that had been built at the start of the decade in China's major cities, but especially in Beijing and Guangzhou.[25] It was gestural, not only expressing a welcoming message to western visitors, but also signalling China's political change away from its singular emphasis on ideological struggle to a more pragmatic emphasis on modernization. It was also described as an "architecture in transition", shifting away from the Soviet-influenced Socialist Realism towards a western modernism.[26] This was not a uniform change, however, and the new architecture of Guangzhou differed in some important respects from that of Beijing. Demonstrating the latest developments of China's modernization, the architecture of Guangzhou was more resolutely in line with western modernism. But the architecture of Beijing was more burdened by the political representation of national identity and adopted a mix of Soviet-influenced "national form" and modernism. Despite the differences between these two cities, we can nonetheless see the profound influence of American architecture in both Guangzhou and Beijing.

Guangzhou, as the window of China, was more connected to the west than other Chinese cities, owing to its distance from Beijing and proximity to Hong Kong. The continuous hosting of the Canton Fair since 1957 made Guangzhou a venue for displaying China's economic achievements before its foreign visitors. In the early 1970s, a series of Guangzhou Foreign Trade Projects, built for the enlarged Canton Fair, were proposed by Zhou Enlai, including the new exhibition hall of Canton Fair (1974), Guangzhou Railway Station (1974), Dongfang Hotel (1971-1973) and the Baiyun Hotel (1972-76).[27] Most of these projects, among others, were built within a complete urban design framework in the Liuhua area in Guangzhou's northern suburbs (Fig. 2).

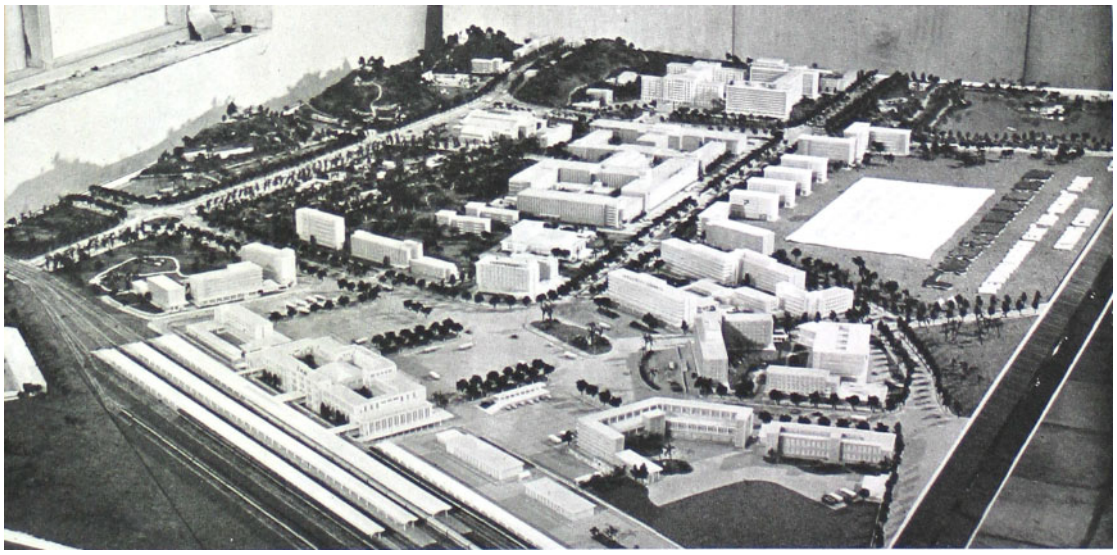

Figure 2. The model of Foreign Trade Projects. Guangzhou Railway Station at the bottom left, and Dongfang Hotel at the top right.
Source: Editorial Committee, ed. *Guangzhou Jianzhu Shilu: Beijiao Bufen Xinjianzhu* (Guangzhou Architectural Record: New Buildings in the Northern Suburb) (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Design Institute, 1976).

Among these projects, an American influence was evident in the extensive and intensive use of modernist formal languages. Symbolically, the pompous Sino-Soviet Friendship Exhibition Hall,once the main venue for the first two Canton Fair sessions in 1957, was remoulded as the core inside the new exhibition hall which , was much larger, lighter and featured a large glazed curtain wall on its façade – reminiscent of America's postwar International Style .

The Dongfang Hotel, the only hotel in which western foreigners were permitted to stay in during Canton Fair sessions, was described as 'not out of place in a western city' and 'reminiscent of western resort hotels' (Fig. 3).[28] The resort hotel as a new building type first emerged in the United States after World War II. It was best exemplified by the hotels built along Miami Beach in the 1950s, designed by Morris Lapidus (1902-2001), including Sans Souci (1949), the Algiers (1950), the Fontainebleau (1952), and the Americana (1956), among others. Responding to the growth of consumer culture, these resort hotels adopted populist design approach to please people and the pleasant and attractive spatial qualities were said to be able to lift people's mood and soul.[29] The Dongfang Hotel had strong similarities to the Lapidus hotels in Miami. For example, while the roof garden was a common feature in American hotels, it was extraordinary in China at the time and designed exclusively for foreign visitors. The simple volume and the continuous horizontal lines on the façade of Dongfang Hotel expressed an elegant aesthetics, similar to the fluent curves on the façade of Hotel Fontainebleau.

Figure 3. Dongfang Hotel, Guangzhou, 1971-1973. Architect: She Junnan.
Source: Editorial Committee, *Guangzhou Jianzhu Shilu.*

Dongfang Hotel was designed by She Junnan (1916-1998), the chief architect of Guangzhou Design Institute (GZDI). He was born in Vietnam and educated in Tangshan, in China's north. He worked in Hong Kong in 1948-51 before moving to Guangzhou. In the Mao era, Guangzhou architects including She Junnan were exposed to the architectural books and magazines imported from Hong Kong.[30] He was also influenced by his close friend in the United States, Wu Jinglu (King-lui Wu, 1918-2002), a classmate in middle school. Wu graduated from Harvard's GSD during the directorship of Gropius and went on to teach at Yale University as an advocate of modernism and opponent of postmodernism. Wu inspired She Junnan to continue with the modernist approach in the new light of American contemporary architecture.[31] She Junnan interpreted Wu's design philosophy as being in the same vein as the underpinnings of American populism, namely that architectural design is based on research on "people" and how they might in various ways be pleased: the spatial arrangement, the experience of space and time, and even the design of furniture.[32] In Dongfang Hotel, the principle of maximizing the pleasure and comfort of consumers as exemplified by commercial American hotels was translated into the idea of designing for "people" to conform to the communist ideology, even though it was not a truly public building for ordinary people. The ostentatious postmodern interior design becoming increasingly evident in American hotels was downplayed in the Dongfang to avoid the criticism of the left. But certain modernist formal moves, such as the continuous horizontal lines and the roof garden, were absorbed to render a modern appearance which was promoted by pragmatists at the time. When leftists gained more power in the middle of the -1970s, these modernist features were still criticized as "capitalist", "feudalist" and "foreign". The pragmatist officials and architects had to justify these design decisions on functional and scientific grounds: the horizontal lines were used for sun shading and rain proofing; and the gardens were designed according to fire safety regulations.[33]

Beijing, as the capital, was the first city to track the changing politics through its new architecture. To accommodate increasing numbers of foreign diplomats from western

countries, a group of diplomatic projects were first proposed in Beijing in 1969, outside Jianguomen Gate, on the northern side of Chang'an Avenue, including the International Club (1969-72), Friendship Store (1969-72), and Diplomatic Residence Compounds (DRC) among others.

These buildings adopted a mix of two formal systems – modernism and national form, to welcome international friends with a modern outlook and to impress them with strong Chinese characteristics. Government officials still required the architects to adopt the "national form" in these projects, although the "big roof" that had prevailed at the heights of National Style was forbidden.[34] But the modernist expression of lightness they introduced was in contrast with the pompous and heavy expression given by the National Style in the 1950s. According to the main architect of these buildings, Wu Guanzhang (born in 1933), this "lightness" was learnt from the architecture in the south, where the climate is warmer and more humid, and where such architectural elements as thin walls, overhanging eaves, and a sense of permeability were commonly found. However, this lightness was criticized by Zhou Enlai following the completion of these buildings for its similarity to tropical architecture and its "unstable" appearance, which was not, he argued, appropriate for Beijing.[35] In terms of cultural-aesthetical preferences, the top pragmatist leaders seemingly favoured classical Chinese architecture over modernism. It was not only a problem of taste, but was always entangled with the political concern to express national identity through architecture. Beijing's architecture from these years retained a residue of the national form inherited from Soviet Socialist Realism and classical Chinese architecture.

The International Club, a community centre exclusively for diplomats living in the DRC and a venue for state level foreign affairs, offers the best example of such a mix of forms (Fig. 4). Its asymmetrical composition and free flowing internal spaces are clearly modernist, but the architectural language of its façade invokes traditional Chinese architecture. The configuration of walls, screens, and interior furnishing that creates the flowing interior space can, though, be commonly found in both traditional Chinese architecture and modernist architecture. The rich collection of art works displayed in this building, at Zhou Enlai's request, likewise combines traditional and modern sources – some of them are in the traditional genre of Chinese painting and calligraphy, but the theme, content and some expressive techniques are quite contemporary (Fig. 5). The project's revocation of classicism in both architecture and art attracted criticism of the left. In 1974, the art works were criticized as a backward and reactionary "black art", only entertaining westerners and "rightist" Chinese officials, but the building itself was not targeted.

Figure 4. Beijing International Club, Beijing, 1972. Architect: Wu Guanzhang.
Source: courtesy of Beijing Institute of Architectural Design (BIAD).

Figure 5. The painting in the main entrance of International Club. "The high mountain and the flowing water", c1971. Artist: Dong Shouping.
Source: courtesy of BIAD.

Interestingly, the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright was in this case also evident in, for example, the horizontality of its façade composition and in the design of the semi-circular reading room. Even the drawing style of the plan was more or less Wrightian, as seen in the depiction of trees, pergola, and the irregular pattern of stones, which showed a strong intention to incorporate natural elements into the building's interior. National forms in this building seemed more simplified than those of the 1950s, reminiscent of Wright's use of decorations abstracting local characteristic. Wu had encountered Wright's architecture as a student at Tsinghua University.[36] His teacher Wang Tan (1916-2001) was one of the most determined followers of Wright in China – once spending a year working at Taliesin. In the early 1960s, Wang Tan particularly promoted Wright's skill in creating open, continuous and spacious interiors and argued that his approach should be differentiated from "formalism".[37]

Inspired by Wright and Wang Tan, Wu Guanzhang initiated a new approach in the case of the International Club, which was rarely seen in the National Style of the 1950s or the functionalism of the following decade: reconciling the contradiction between the modern and the national to express both a modern outlook and national identity. But this was a "semi-modernist" solution, since the simplified national form and the modernist structure were combined, or rather fused, into a single entity, which inevitably compromised its "modernist" purity. Was there pure "modernist" solution that could serve as an alternative answer to the needs of representing national identity *and* absorbing western modernity at a time in which China and the west were in greater contact?

The Baiyun Hotel: A Chinese Hilton?

Following the completion of the first of these projects, two new hotel projects – the Beijing Hotel East and the Baiyun Hotel – were in 1972 launched in Beijing and Guangzhou, respectively, with high expectations from the central government.

A group of top Chinese architects was sent to Hong Kong that same year, with government support, to investigate new hotels.[38] Although no media coverage or records of this trip appear

to have survived, we may still assume that they sought to visit a number of new hotels built in the 1960s in Hong Kong, including the Hilton (1961), Mandarin (1963), Hyatt Regency (1969), and Empress (1962). These hotels provided the visiting Chinese architects with models of western standards and examples of the latest trends in hotel design. Among them, the Hong Kong Hilton, the city's first five-star hotel, likely figured prominently as a precedent to study given its global prestige in defining the lifestyle of American elitists and its highly political and ideological symbolism. As the president of Hilton International, Conrad Hilton, said, each of Hilton hotels was a 'little America' and each was intended, besides turning a profit, to 'excise our strength and power for good against evil'.[39] Hilton hotels were deliberately built in the "front" regions between the capitalist and communist blocs, such as Eastern Europe and the Middle East. As a frontier between the capitalist United Kingdom and communist China, Hong Kong was a perfect location for a new Hilton and, more symbolically, the Hong Kong Hilton stood cheek-by-jowl alongside the Communist Bank of China. Ironically, American tourists often wandered into the Chinese bank to cash traveller's cheques.[40] To materialize the ideology and the economic superiority of the United States, the form, technology and landscaping of the Hilton hotels were trenchantly modern. However, they commonly sought to "fit in" with their settings. The interior design, especially, was often consciously associated to local characteristics. In a western context, local artists were commissioned to make public works in line with American abstract expressionism to decorate the interior. In such contexts as Asia and Africa, indigenous crafts and ancient artefacts were often deployed to provide local references to make the modern structure less alien in the recipient country.[41] Importantly, these local decorative elements were independent of the modern structure. This was critical for demonstrating that Hilton hotels were actually demarcated from the local tradition despite the "respect" and curiosity of the Americans paid to the local, implying an asymmetrical relation between the United States and those countries into which Hilton had expanded his business.

The idea of representing local identity was also adopted by Chinese architects; however, the embedded demonstration of American superiority was translated into a demonstration of Chinese national identity, albeit manifest in different ways in Beijing and Guangzhou. The Beijing Hotel East adopted a pompous, classical and solemn composition with an explicit elaboration of national form that rectified the "mistake" of the lightness of the early 1970s and slightly returned to the National Style of the 1950s. But the Baiyun Hotel in Guangzhou, designed by Mo Bozhi (1914-2003), adopted a different strategy by separating the two formal systems – the modernist structure and the traditional decoration – in the manner of the Hilton hotels (Fig.6).

Figure 6. Baiyun Hotel, Guangzhou, 1976. Architect: Mo Bozhi.
Source: Editorial Committee, ed. *Jianzhu Shilu: Baiyun Binguan* (Architecture Illustrated: White Cloud Hotel) (Beijing: Technical Information Institute, c1976).

Compared to the Dongfang Hotel, the interior design of the Baiyun Hotel was much more strongly emphasized. The renderings depict the extensive use of material, furniture, decorative art and interior plants that could be commonly found in Chinese traditional architecture (Fig. 7). Although many of these elaborative details were not ultimately realized due to the limitations of the project budget (according to the explanation of one architect) ,[42] some simplified forms that were both modernist-abstract and traditional-decorative were indeed realized. Unlike the Soviet-influenced architecture of the 1950s, in which national form was integrated with a pompous and heavy construction, in the design of the Baiyun Hotel, local characteristics were applied to a purely modernist structure. This, perhaps, was a budgetary compromise, but was just as likely to have been a desirable consequence of learning from the Hong Kong Hilton. Such a modernist solution to reconcile the national and

the modern, like “Columbus’ egg,” seemed simple, but in fact continued to puzzled Chinese architects and political leaders for a long time. Only in the 1970s, when modernism became more accessible to architects in China, and more acceptable to its political leaders, and when the model offered by contemporary American architecture could inform the work of Chinese architects, could this solution be adopted.

Figure 7. Rendering of the suits in the Baiyun Hotel.
Source: Lin Zhaozhang, *Lin Zhaozhang Jianzhu Chuangzuo Shougao* (Lin Zhaozhang's Architectural Drawings) (Beijing: Guoji Wenhua Chuban Gongsi, 1997), 8.

Traditional garden-making skills were further incorporated into this modernist composition. This is evident at all levels, from the master plan to the interior. In the master plan (Fig. 8), for instance, the traditional strategy of “taking advantage of the existing condition” was manifest in the decision to retain a small hill at the south end of the site: it screened the entrance from the noise and view of the front road; provided a sense of safety and privacy out of a consideration of “Fengshui”; and it was served as the entrance for those pedestrians who chose to walk up the small hill and before crossing a sky bridge into the main reception hall, all separated from the cars at the ground level. The major trees on the site were also carefully preserved through the judicious placement of the main slab and the podium within which courtyards were created around the trees. And the ponds and greenery were further skilfully blended into the master plan composition. As a consequence, the continuous experience between the interior and exterior was different from the insulated and large-scale interior atrium of the American hotels. On the ground-floor plan, two view axes intersect perpendicularly at the double-height main entrance hall. The north-south axis extends from the small hill to deep within the building, ending at a peaceful small inner garden behind the elevator hall. The perpendicular west-east axis connects the staircase to the left and the courtyards and gardens to the right, extending to a small hill on which a large old banyan tree sat . The continuous spatial sequences and unpredictable experience with variety, dynamics, and rhythm all remind us of the labyrinth-like traditional Chinese gardens.

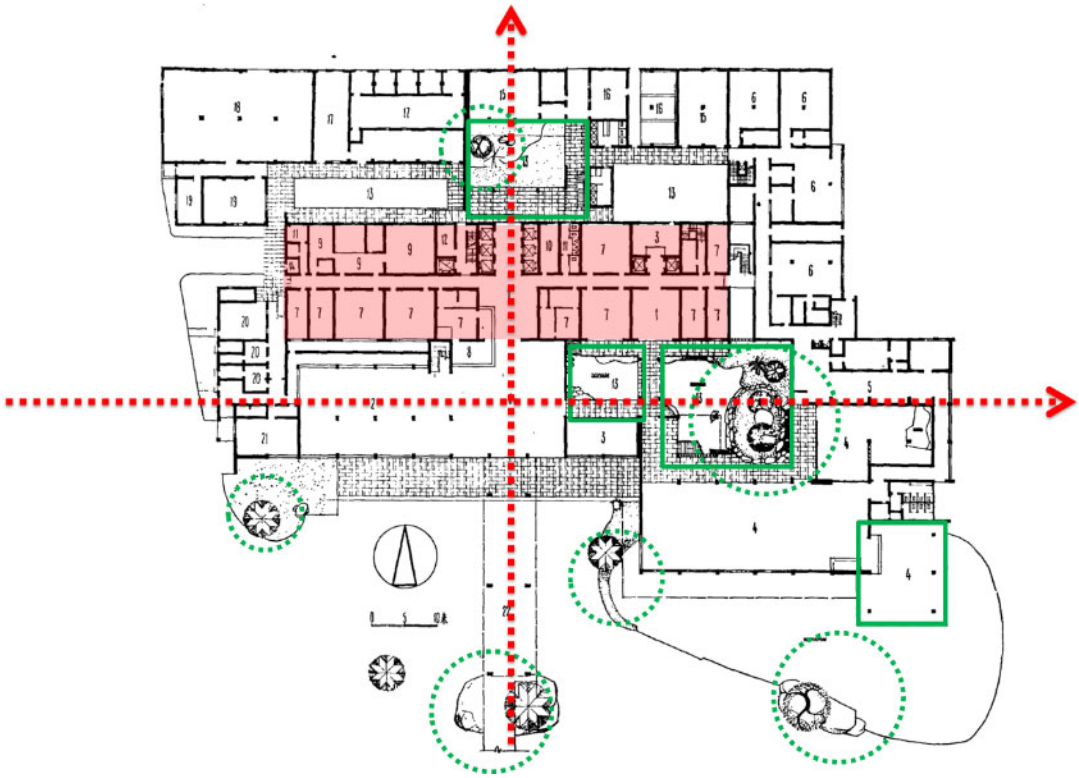

Figure 8. Analysis on the main tower, axis, trees and courtyards of Baiyun Hotel.
Source: Drawn by the author, based on the original plan from: Baiyun Hotel Design Team, "Guangzhou Baiyun Binguan" (Guangzhou White Cloud Hotel), *Jianzhu Xuebao* (Architectural Journal), no. 03 (1977): 18-23.

In fact, this attempt should be credited to Mo Bozhi's long-term interest in reviving traditional southern gardens. Mo was immersed in the knowledge of traditional Chinese culture and architecture since his childhood – his family not only owned a library containing "500 thousand books" but also ran a business of constructing traditional houses and gardens. In the 1950s, he began to survey the traditional gardens in the Guangdong Province with Xia Changshi (1903-96).[43] Mo had been experimenting with the combination of traditional gardens with small modernist buildings since the 1960s, but it was only with his design for the Baiyun Hotel that he could for the first time incorporate gardens into a highly functional and large-scale skyscraper.

Compared to the International Club, which used the simplified national form and classical façade composition to explicitly express national identity in a modern fashion, the Baiyun Hotel interpreted national identity in a more subtle and creative way, both through the "superficial" decorative elements referencing the American strategy of separation, and in the "deep" spatial organization referring back to the native garden-making tradition. Two sources of knowledge, both the traditional-Chinese and the contemporary-American, were here employed, and the American influence appears to have served as a catalyst for the re-excavation of Chinese native tradition. Throughout the history of Mao's China, the knowledge of traditional Chinese architecture was constantly referenced. But compared to the 1950s revival of the monumental palatial architecture in the National Style, the spatial tactics of traditional gardens were in the 1970s emphatically developed and re-interpreted. This shift of focus was related to the influence of contemporary American architecture, which demonstrated that a decorative regime with local references could operate separated to the modern structure to which it was attached. Therefore, a purely modernist formal framework

could be adopted to provide more flexibility and freedom in re-interpreting traditional garden-making spatial tactics – more so, it seems, than the formal systems of a more tentative modernism or the Beaux-Arts.

Conclusion

In the Mao era, especially from the late-1960s to mid-1970s, changing international and domestic politics and a power struggle between leftists and pragmatists within China's state authority all provided a backdrop for the flow of knowledge and its effects on architectural form in China. Political discourses about modernization and national identity, knowledge of American architecture and of Chinese gardens, and the architects' adaptive design in creating "Chineseness" in modernism together formed a triangular relation between politics, knowledge, and form .

The leftists and pragmatists in China's state government had different outlooks on such issues as modernization, communication with the west, and the architectural expression of national identity. The leftists promoted an egalitarian functionalism for modernizing the whole country without specifically referencing the aesthetics of contemporary western architecture. They considered the idea of national identity backward and incompatible with functionalism, which was furthermore associated with radical communism. The pragmatists, on the other hand, favoured the progressiveness of modernism, absorbing western knowledge. Modernism was thus adopted in those key symbolic projects that served, too, as machines of modernization; and the idea of a Chinese national identity was considered important in extending the native tradition, demanding expression as a "Chineseness" in modernist design in architecture. In this sense, the materialization of the key projects in the 1970s through the projection of new architectural forms should be credited to the temporary and relative victory of the pragmatists over the leftists, especially in the first half of the 1970s.

Two hitherto separate bodies of knowledge of architectural history and design came to converge and intertwine in the 1970s to inform the new design: knowledge about modern American architecture; and of traditional Chinese gardens. They were made to mix and mingle in different ratios in different cases, supporting the creation of new forms and representing new political aims. Responding to political demands and based on professional knowledge obtained from various sources, architects in China at this moment of the 1970s had created a manifestation of "Chineseness" in a modernist language. This is the first time in Chinese history where modernism was explicitly adopted at such a great scale, for so many state and public buildings of national importance. The modernist formal language adopted at this moment for a country ending its "revolution" and embarking upon a more "open" relationship with the west (from 1976-78 onwards) clearly conveyed the motivations and prospects for China's modernization. At the same time, though, it also expressed the country's national traditions. By adapting modernism to China's needs, informed by a wide variety of American precedents, architects had managed to bring Chineseness and modernism into a synthesis. They achieved this in several specific ways. Borrowing ideas from contemporary American architecture, the Chinese had focused selectively on a few formal expressions and design strategies, and made a re-interpretation of the political messages of the American designs to conform to the "correct" ideology of the time in China, including careful justifications to avoid possible criticism. Local traditions both ancient and recent were also employed: traditional garden-making skills were invoked to serve current political agendas and to enter into new kinds of synthesis with borrowed western design ideas. While at the same time a more recent tradition, dating to the decades spanning from the 1930s to the 1950s, of projecting a national identity based on studies of ancient architecture was also renewed and developed. Specific formal innovations in design were furthermore employed

and materialized, as in the subtle rotation of the building volume in the design of BMICH, and the strategic use of existing site condition in the design of the Baiyun Hotel.

Taken together, these cases show that architects in China in the 1970s had successfully overcome restrictions in budget, technology and state ideology, and in so doing had come to absorb some latest formal-aesthetic ideas of architecture of the United States.. A Chineseness was created with a modernist language and tactics that were, in part, arguably American in origin, translated to serve a political project of Chinese modernization and national representation. And yet the way these design strategies were made to respond to domestic political needs and international design influences reveals something of a generic wisdom at work across these decades in China – a combination of necessary political savvy, rich disciplinary knowledge and dexterous design skills - an observation that requires further investigation.

Notes

[1] For example, Jefferey Cody has systematically studied the global export of American architecture from 1870 to 2000, and one chapter of his book is dedicated to the postwar years from 1945 to 1975. Jeffrey W. Cody, *Exporting American Architecture, 1870-2000* (London: Routledge, 2003), 122-55.

[2] Jane C. Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998); Ron Theodore Robin, *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900-1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Annabel Jane Wharton, *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[3] American influence in Britain has been systematically studied. See Murray Fraser and Joe Kerr, *Architecture and the "Special Relationship": The American Influence on Post-War British Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2007).IIn Australia, several related topics could be found. For example, Paul Hogben, "'Architecture and Arts' and the Mediation of American Architecture in Post-War Australia," *Fabrications* 22, no. 1 (2012): 30-57; Peter Vernon, "Shopping Towns Australia," *Fabrications* 22, no. 1 (2012): 102-121; and Philip Goad, "Importing Expertise: Australian-US Architects and the Large-Scale, 1945-90," which appears elsewhere in this very issue of *Fabrications*. (I searched and found this, Philip Goad, "Constructing Pedigree: Robin Boyd's 'California-Victoria-New Empiricism' Axis," *Fabrications* 22, no. 1 (2012): 4-29.)On Germany and Japan, see Peter Krieger, "Learning from America: Postwar Urban Recovery in West Germany" and Botond Bognar, "Surface above All? American Influence on Japanese," both in *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan*, ed. Heide Fehrenbach and Uta G. Poiger (New York: Berghahn, 2000), 187-207 and 45-78, resp..

[4] For example, Anoma Pieris, "'Tropical' Cosmopolitanism? The Untoward Legacy of the American Style in Postindependence Ceylon/Sri Lanka," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 32, no. 3 (2011): 332-49.

[5] For example, the influence of western perspective drawing on the formation of the National Style in the 1950s and the emergence of the "socialist modernism" following the Sino-American rapprochement in the 1970s were studied. See Jianfei Zhu, *Architecture of Modern China: A Historical Critique* (London: Routledge, 2009), 75-104, 231-44.

[6] Architectural development in Mao's China has been systematically studied by several scholars. See Zou Denong, *Zhongguo Xiandai Jianzhu Shi* (A History of Modern Chinese Architecture) (Tianjin: Tianjin Kexue Jishu Chubanshe, 2001); Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan, *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002); and Zhu, *Architecture of Modern China.*

[7] It is also necessary to differentiate the influence of the United States from a broader concept of western influence in China. Indeed, many postwar American architects were European émigrés, such as Mies and Gropius, and American postwar architecture was definitely a continuation of prewar modernism. But American identity was trenchantly incorporated in the buildings such as American embassies and Hilton hotels, irrespective of the architects' nationalities.

[8] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 3-17.

[9] More specifically, these architects were trained in the University of Pennsylvania. Wang Guixiang, "Jianzhuxue Zhuanye Zoaqi Zhongguo Liumeisheng Yu Binxifaniya Daxue Jianzhu Jiaoyu" (First Chinese Students in the United States and Education in the School of Fine Art in University of Pennsylvania), *Jianzhushi* (History of Architecture) 2 (2003): 218-38.

[10] Zhu, *Architecture of Modern China,* 75-104.

[11] It had the largest architectural library in Maoist China including 100,000 volumes and more than 400 journals in which 60 percent were in foreign languages. Editorial Committee, *Zhongguo Jianzhu Shejiyuan Chengli Wushi Zhounian Jinian Congshu: Licheng Pian* (China Architecture Design & Research Group 50th Anniversary Collection: The History Volume) (Beijing: China Architecture Design & Research Group , 2002), 133-40.

[12] Graham Towers and Bernard Zumthor, "China Today," *Architects' Journal* 158, no. 51 (1973): 1514-47; Robin Thompson, Richard Kirkby and Nick Jeffrey, "China," *Architectural Design* 49, no. 3 (1974): 138-57; Joseph T. A. Lee and Michael Mealey [CHECKED IN AVERY, PLEASE CONFIRM, confirmed, thanks!], "The New China," *Architectural Record* 154, no. 4 (1973): 127-34; Walter Wagner, "A Report on Life and Architecture in China Today," *Architectural Record126*, no. 9 (1974): 111-24.

[13] Malcolm Stuart, "China's Achievements on Show," *Guardian*, September 30, 1971.

[14] "Architects from China Tour U. S. Quietly," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1975.

[15] Duanfang Lu, "Introduction: Architecture, Modernity and Identity in the Third World," in *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity*, ed. Duanfang Lu (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1-28.

[16] According to Cui Kai, who succeeded Dai Nianci as the chief architect of the China Architecture Design & Research Group (former BIDI) , Dai's admiration and reference to the American Embassy was obvious and well-known among the architect's circle despite no credible publication. Interview with Cui Kai by Ke Song, January 4, 2015.

[17] You Baoxian, *Zhujian Zhongsi Youyi Zhi Mingzhu* (Build the Friendship of China and Sri Lanka) (Beijing: Zhongguo Jianzhu Gongye Chubanshe, 2012), 9.

[18] Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 195.

[19] Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 194-95.

[20] You, *Zhujian Zhongsi Youyi Zhi Mingzhu*, 10.

[21] Interview with Cui Kai.

[22] Editorial Committee, *Waiguo Jinxiandai Jianzhu Shi* (Modern History of Foreign Architecture) (Beijing: Zhongguo Jianzhu Gongye Chubanshe, 1982), 224-99, esp. 250-56.

[23] Gu Qiyuan, "Ziben Zhuyi Guojia Xiandai Jianzhu De Ruogan Wenti" (Several Issues on Modern Architecture in Capitalist Countries), *Jianzhu Xuebao* (Architectural Journal), no. 11 (1962): 18-20.

[24] Both Stone's and Dai's works showed an inheritance of the Beaux-Arts traditions in their symmetrical composition and modernist taste for abstraction. Such an agglomeration in Dai's work was also related to the influence of Soviet Stalinist architecture and the legacy of the first-generation Chinese architects who were educated in Beaux-Arts tradition. Dai himself was trained in Tsinghua University under Liang Sicheng.

[25] Lee and Mealey, "The New China", 127-134; Wagner, "A Report", 111-24. PLEASE CONFIRM REF, confirmed

[26] Lee and Mealey, "The New China", 127-134. PLEASE CONFIRM REF, confirmed

[27] Cai Dedao, "Wenge Zhong De Guangzhou Waimao Gongcheng (1972-1976) (Guangzhou Foreign Trade Project in Cultural Revolution)," *Yangcheng Jingu (History of Guangzhou)* 02 (2006): 23-28.

[28] Lee and Mealey, "The New China", 134 PLEASE CONFIRM REF, confirmed; Wagner, "A Report," 115-18.

[29] Deborah Desilets, *Morris Lapidus: The Architecture of Joy* (New York: Rizzoli, 2010), 11-17.

[30] She Junan, *She Junnan Xuanji* (Selected Works of She Junnan) (Beijing: Zhongguo Jianzhu Gongye Chubanshe 1997), 388-91. Interview with Feng Jiang by Ke Song, February 5, 2015.

[31] She, *She Junnan Xuanji*, 26-35.

[32] She Junan, "Jianzhu: Dui Ren De Yanjiu: Tan Jianzhu Chuangzuo Jibengong Ji Jianzhushi De Suzhi" (Architecture: The Research on People: On the Basic Skills of Architectural Creation and the Quality of Architects), *Jianzhu Xuebao* (Architectural Journal) 10 (1985): 2-4.

[33] Cai, “Wenge Zhong,” 23-28.

[34] Interview with Wu Guanzhang by Ke Song, January 8, 2015.

[35] Zhang Bo, *Wo De Jianzhu Chuangzuo Daolu* (My Architectural Creation Path) (Beijing: Zhongguo Jianzhu Gongye Chubanshe, 2001), 274, 277.

[36] Interview with Wu Guanzhang.

[37] Wang Tan, “Wang Tan Jiaoshou Tan Xifang Jianzhu De Shineiwai Kongjian Chuli” (Prof. Wang Tan on the Interior Spatial Design of Western Architecture), *Jianzhu Xuebao* 7 (1962): 24.

[38] Zhang Bo, *Wo De*, 257; Lee, and Mealey, "The New China," 134. CONFIRM REF,confirmed

[39] Conrad N. Hilton, *Be My Guest* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 267, quoted in Wharton, *Building the Cold War*, 8.

[40] Alex Campbell, "Hilton and Mao: Cheek by Jowl," *New Republic* 160, no. 18 (1969): 11-13.

[41] Wharton, *Building the Cold War*, 4-5.

[42] Cai, “Wenge Zhong,” 23-28.

[43] In 1963, their research resulted in the manuscript *Lingnan Tingyuan*, but it was published decades later. Xia Changshi, Mo Bozhi, and Zeng Zhaofen (eds.), *Lingnan Tingyuan* (Lingnan Gardens) (Beijing: Zhongguo Jianzhu Gongye Chubanshe, 2008), postscript. Xia came back from Germany and once worked in Yingzao Xueshe (the Society for the Research of Chinese Architecture) under the leadership of Liang Sicheng. Or: the Society for Research in.